





THE SUMMER MIGRANT SONG BIRDS  
OF GREAT BRITAIN.



THE WHEATEAR.  
CHIFF-CHAFF.  
GRASSHOPPER WARBLER.  
REED WARBLER.  
BLACKCAP.  
WOOD WREN.  
SEdge BIRD.  
REDSTART.  
WHITETHROAT.  
YELLOW WILLOW WREN.  
BABILLARD.  
NIGHTINGALE.  
GREATER PETTICHAPS.  
WHINCHAT.  
TREE PIPIT.  
CHIMNEY SWALLOW.



THE SUMMER MIGRANT  
SONG BIRDS OF GREAT BRITAIN.

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THE WHEATEAR.

*SYLVIA ŒNANTHE*, LATH.

THE WHEATEAR, or Fallow-chat, which appears in this country towards the latter end of March, is about six inches in length, and weighs about six drachms. The colours of the Wheatear are very pure, and the bird has a remarkably clean appearance.

The female is a little heavier than the male, has all the markings of that sex, but less vivid, and is brownish on the back.

These birds are very abundant in the summer, and distributed over the whole country; being found in those places which are adapted for their habits in every latitude from the shores of the Channel to the Orkney Isles.

Bare and stony places are their favourite retreats. Their perch is on clods, and especially on stones, beneath which they form their nests. "They do not, however," says Mr. Mudie, "always nestle under stones; they resort to those places where there

is most food for them, and nestle under whatever suits their purpose best. They love a dripping sky and misty atmosphere, because these are favourable to the growth and also to the appearance of those earth-worms which form their principal food." They likewise feed on flies and other insects, which they catch as they run along.

"It is a very lively and interesting species," says Mr. Sweet. "In a wild state they are chiefly to be found on hills or commons, and very frequently in parks and rabbit-warrens: in some counties they are so plentiful that some hundred dozens are caught annually by the shepherds, who sell them for the sake of their flesh, which is very delicious, particularly in autumn, when they become very fat."

The song of this bird (observes Montagu) is pleasingly varied; is uttered not unfrequently on the wing, hovering over the female in the courting season, and displaying its tail in a very singular manner by an expansion of the feathers. Its flight is smooth and rapid, but near the surface of the ground; and it commonly alights upon the top of a small hillock, stone, or wall.

In confinement (Mr. Sweet says) they are almost continually in song, and sing by night as well as day: they have a very pleasant, variable and agreeable song, different from all other birds; and sometimes it is very loud, and they continue it a great length of time,—not continually breaking

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off, like a Robin Redbreast and some other birds ; but their winter song is the best and most varied.

In confinement these birds require the same sort of food as the Stonechat, Whinchat, and Nightingale, feeding freely on bruised hemp-seed and bread, with some fresh, raw, lean meat, cut up in small pieces, and mixed with it : they are also very fond of the yolk of an egg boiled hard, which should be given separately ; also all sorts of insects,—all the sorts that the Nightingale or Whinchat will eat they are also very fond of, and the more they have given to them, the better and the more they will sing : they are particularly fond of cockroaches and crickets.\*

The Wheatear often makes its nest in a deserted rabbit-burrow, or in an old stone quarry ; sometimes in a heap of stones, or a hole in a wall ; but most times on the ground. It is composed of moss, and dried stalks and fibres put together with wool, and lined with hair or wool. The eggs are five or six in number, of a uniformly pale blue colour. In September they begin to retire, and seem to assemble from all parts to the Sussex and Dorset downs, contiguous to the coast, preparatory to their departure. The quantity taken annually about Eastbourn is prodigious ;—Mr. Pennant says, 1840 dozen. These are caught in a singular manner, by placing two turfs on edge ; at each end of which a small horse-hair noose is fixed to a stick,

\* British Warblers.

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which the bird, either in search of food or to evade a storm of rain, attempts to get under, and is caught. It is esteemed a great delicacy, not much inferior to the Ortolan, and is sometimes sent to the London market ready picked.\*

\* Ornithological Dictionary.



THE CHIFF-CHAFF,  
OR LESSER PETTICHAPS.

*SYLVIA HIPPOLAIS*, LATH.

THE length of this little bird varies from four inches and a half to five inches. In its plumage it so much resembles the Hay-bird, or Willow Wren, that the two birds are frequently confounded, and with them the Wood Wren: but this last is at once distinguished by the under tail-coverts being a pure white, and the plumage of a more lively green on the upper parts than either of the others. The Chiff-chaff differs from the Willow Wren in its general colour, not being so much tinged with yellow; and the legs are dusky, which in the other are brown.

As it has not the varied and melodious song of the Warblers, nor is its nest formed in the careless manner that is characteristic of that species, but in a neat and careful manner, the author of the British Naturalist considers it a Wren.

It seems to be the hardiest and more generally diffused of all our summer visitants; it is found in all parts of the kingdom where wood and hedges afford it shelter and food. Its note is heard long after the Hay-bird is silent; and if the autumn is mild, it remains as a straggler in the warmer parts of the country all the winter.

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“ This interesting little species,” says Mr. Sweet, “ is generally the first of the Warblers that visit us in spring, except *Sylvia œnanthe* (the Wheatear), which occasionally precedes it. The earliest time of their arrival that ever I noticed was the 12th March. Some years they do not visit us till the end of that month. I have frequently known several days of hard frost after their arrival; so that it is not a very tender bird. On their first coming to this country, they are mostly seen in the forwardest trees in orchards or copses, flying from branch to branch, and from tree to tree, singing their curious song of ‘ chiff-chaff, chivvy-chavvy:’ if the weather is fine and mild, they are continually in motion, flying after each other, and catching the gnats and small flies that happen to come in their way. This species is very partial to the different sorts of aphid which infest the trees and plants in summer; they are also fond of small caterpillars, flies, and moths; on their first arrival they feed chiefly on the larvæ of the different species of tortrix that are rolled in the unfolding buds of various trees.”

From the length of time that this bird not only remains in the country, but continues in song, (Mr. Mudie observes,) it probably has two broods in favourable situations; and that may account for the considerable differences in size and weight that are found in different specimens, and also for the fact of some remaining over the winter.

Before it finally leaves the country, the insect

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supply is greatly diminished ; and as it has been known to eat small seeds in confinement, it probably also does so naturally in the latter part of the season.\*

Mr. Sweet says it is readily taken in a trap baited with small caterpillars, or a rose branch covered with aphides. They soon get familiar in confinement. When first caught, they should, if possible, be put with other birds ; and they will readily take to feed on bruised hemp-seed and bread,† and on bread and milk, which must at first be stuck full of small insects, or a quantity of aphides may be shaken off a branch upon it : when they have once tasted it, they will be very fond of it.‡

The nest is oval, with a small hole near the top, composed externally of dry leaves, and then coarse dry grass, and lined with feathers, and is generally placed on or near the ground, frequently on a ditch, in a tuft of grass, or low bush. The eggs are six

\* Mudie's British Birds.

† This is the general food recommended by Mr. Sweet for all soft-billed birds : it is composed of an equal portion of bruised hemp-seed and bread, mixed up in the following manner :—First put some hemp-seed in a little pan or saucer, and pour some boiling water on it ; then with a stick flattened at the end, or some such instrument, bruise it as fine as possible, and add the same quantity of soft bread, which must also be bruised up with it, so that the oily milk from the seeds may be mixed with the bread till it is of the consistence of a moist paste. It should be mixed up every day, particularly in summer, or the stale food will injure their health, and make them dislike it altogether.

‡ British Warblers.

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in number, white, speckled with purplish red at the larger end only, with here and there a single speck on the sides.

This bird in some places is known by the name of Chip-chop. Indeed, (says Mr. Mudie,) it is accused of falling into the habit of the people of the district which it frequents, substituting one for another of those letters that belong to the same organic expression with *f*; being "*chiv-chov*," "*chiff-chaff*," "*chib-chob*," or "*chip-chop*," according to the locality.

## THE GRASSHOPPER WARBLER.

*SYLVIA LOCUSTELLA*, LATH.

THIS bird, sometimes called Grasshopper Lark, has considerable resemblance to the Sedge Bird (*Sylvia phragmites*) and to the Reed Warbler (*Sylvia arundinacea*); yet there are many differences by which they may be distinguished from each other, besides their notes, which are very dissimilar.

The plumage of the present species is on the whole upper parts of a more greenish hue than the others, and mottled. The feathers of the tail are somewhat pointed, which is a very marked and peculiar character in this species; the outer feather being full an inch shorter than the middle ones, and nearly rounded at the tips: the wing remarkably short, reaching very little beyond the base of the tail; legs very pale brown.

Some confusion (says Mr. Rennie) has arisen respecting this bird, from an idea that it is a Lark, and not a Warbler. It is, however, in every respect dissimilar in character and habits to the Larks. It has no long claw behind, resides in thickets, and is incapable of running on the ground like a Lark, but moves by hopping; so that the confusion can only arise from ignorance of the bird's habits.\*

The Grasshopper Warbler is not a plentiful

\* Ornithological Dictionary, Rennie's edit.

species (observes Montagu), but probably appears less so by its habit of concealing itself amongst the furze and thick hedges, discovering its place of concealment only by its singular cricket-like note, which is so exactly like that of the mole cricket as scarcely to be distinguished.

Mr. Sweet says they are very rare in the neighbourhood of London, but are frequently seen in Norfolk and Suffolk, and in various other parts. We have found it (says Montagu) in Hampshire, in South Wales, and in Ireland, but nowhere so plentiful as on Malmsbury Common, in Wiltshire, to which place the males come about the second week in April. At this time only they expose themselves upon the top branches of the furze, and are continually making their singular chirping notes, their only song. As soon as the females arrive, which is in about ten days after, the males no longer expose themselves, and are almost silent till about the dusk of the evening, when they are incessantly crying,—possibly to decoy the larger species of grasshoppers or mole crickets, which begin their chirping with the setting sun.

The Grasshopper bird, though it is classed with the aquatic warblers, differs from those birds, and indeed from all the true warblers, in plumage and expression, as well as in haunt and habits. The true warblers, whether aquatic or sylvan, have the colour on the back entire, even when there are strong markings on the other parts; but the upper part of the Grasshopper bird is mottled brown, and the whole dress has a tinge of that hue which

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characterises the field birds. When all together, however, it is not like any of them; but stands alone, in appearance, in voice, and in habits.

The fore part of this bird is very thickly, and the whole bird very closely feathered, presenting no point that can be broken and no place that can be easily ruffled on a forward motion; so that the bird slides unhurt through places where birds of different form and plumage would be torn in pieces. The closest hedge or brake presents no barrier to it; so that it slips into the hedge one knows not where; and threading along without stirring a twig, it will apparently in an instant slip out again at the distance of several yards. It does not often leave its cover; and one may watch, and even beat the brake, hearing it, but without being able to see either it or its nest, for the nest is as well hidden as the bird is expert at hiding. In the hedges and bramble brakes (Mr. Mudie says) the materials are the withered stems of trailing plants; and in furze bushes, where those plants are not so abundant, they are more mossy. The eggs are four or five, of a bluish-white, with very obscure rust-coloured mottlings.\*

Mudie's British Birds.

## THE REED WARBLER.

*SYLVIA ARUNDINACEA*, LATH.

THIS species, sometimes called the Lesser Reed Sparrow or Reed Wren, has often been confounded with the Sedge Warbler. It may however be distinguished from that bird by the base of the bill being broader; in having no light shade over the eye, which in the other is broad and conspicuous; and in the whole upper parts being of one plain olive brown colour, the under parts more inclined to yellow. There is but little difference in the female.

Mr. Sweet describes the Reed Warbler as “a pretty little lively species, generally frequenting the sides of rivers and ditches, when in a wild state, where its warbling song may be heard amongst the reeds and sedges, or other thickets, that are near the water; visiting us the beginning or middle of April, and leaving again in September: towards autumn it leaves its usual haunts, and frequents the gardens for the sake of insects. It is particularly fond of the common house-fly (*Musca domestica*); and I have frequently seen several of them in August, and the beginning of September by the side of large dung-heaps, where those flies breed, and about that time are coming out from the pupa state in great quantities: they may then



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be readily taken in a trap baited with a small moth or green caterpillar. Being very wild and restless when first caught, they should, if possible, be placed in a cage with other tame birds; or if one is placed in a cage by itself, it should be set near a cage with some other bird in it, which reconciles it to confinement."\*

It will readily take to feed on bruised hemp-seed and bread, if a few flies or other small insects are stuck into the paste. It is likewise fond of the yolk of a boiled egg, which should not be mixed with the bread and hemp-seed, but be given by itself as a change of food. Any small insects, such as the smooth caterpillars, moths, butterflies, spiders, grasshoppers, crickets, ants, &c. they are very partial to. As they are fond of washing, a pan of water should for that purpose be placed in the cage during summer; but it should not be allowed this luxury in the winter season.

The nest is composed of long grass and the seed-branches of reeds, and lined with the finer parts of the latter; it is very deep, and conceals the bird when sitting. This is generally fastened by long grass to several reeds, which are drawn together for that purpose, and generally placed over the water. The eggs are four or five in number, rather larger than those of the Sedge bird, of a greenish white, blotched all over with dusky brown.

This species is much more local than the Sedge bird, but they are sometimes found together.

\* British Warblers.

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Their notes are similar; and we have found (says Montagu) both species all along the coasts of Kent and Sussex, from Sandwich to Arundel, amongst the reedy pools and ditches, especially on Romney Marsh: but in Wiltshire and Somersetshire, where the Sedge Warbler is found in abundance, throughout the banks of the Avon not a single Reed Warbler is to be found.

This bird (says Mr. Mudie) rarely if ever perches on the top of the reeds, even on its first arrival; and when the song of invitation to a mate is given, its place is on a leaning stem, though upon emergency it can cling to an upright one, the stiff feathers of the tail acting as a sort of prop. Its food, he says, is found wholly over the stagnant waters.

## THE BLACKCAP.

*SYLVIA ATRICAPILLA*, LATH.

THIS species arrives in England generally early in April; the male birds making their appearance before the females. It leaves us again in September. It measures nearly six inches in length. Woods and thick hedges are its favourite haunts; it likewise seems particularly partial to orchards and gardens, where it delights us with a wild melodious song.

“The Blackcap,” says Syme, “is truly a most delightful warbler, and may be ranked as second in the class of British Song Birds. Indeed, in our opinion, its mellow notes are equal, if not superior in richness of tone, to any in the Nightingale’s song. It is true the warble is desultory, but sweetly wild, and full of melody. The cadence rises and swells, then dies away in a soft and plaintive strain. Its shake or trilling note is the finest we ever heard.” According to Bechstein, the female sings also, but in a more limited degree, very much like the Redbreast.

The female is distinguished from the other sex by the crown of the head, which is of a dull rust colour; she is also superior in size. Both birds occasionally perform the office of incubation. The nest is built in some low bush or shrub, composed

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of dried stalks, generally of goose-grass, put together in a very neat manner, with a little wool, and sometimes a little green moss, on the outside : the interior is lined with fibrous roots, upon which are frequently placed a few long hairs. The eggs are four or five in number, of a pale reddish brown, mottled or stained with a few ash-coloured spots. When the season is favourable, the Blackcaps rear a second, and sometimes even a third brood ; and when they are deprived of their eggs, they persist in fresh nidifications to a much later period of the season than almost any other of our summer birds.

Sir William Jardine thinks the Blackcap retires in winter to Madeira, having received specimens of it from that island ; but Dr. Heinaken, who resided there, tells us that it is resident all the year.\*

The author of the *British Naturalist* states that it extends almost as far north into Scotland as there are woods that suit its habits. It prefers those that are close with underwood, and is very abundant in pine plantations when young. In those places it is one of the most common song birds, and makes the whole wood ring with its music. He likewise says that Blackcaps are not so wholly dependant upon insect food as some of their congeners ; and therefore those that come before the equinoctial storms that sometimes shut up the earth in frost for several days are not reduced to the same extremity as some other migra-

\* Zoological Journal.

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tory birds. They can eat the berries of ivy, and the others that form part of the food of the resident birds in the early spring; and when insects begin to be scarce before the Blackcaps take their departure, they become plunderers of gardens. This is a common habit with such of the sylvan warblers as come near the habitations of man; and they levy on cherries, currants, strawberries, and other small and early fruits, a tax for the service which they render in destroying the insects, and the pleasure they afford by the songs that accompany their labours.

The Blackcap's song is generally given from a high perch or an elevated branch, or the top twig if the tree be not very lofty. While it sings, the axis of the body is very oblique, by the elevation of the head, and the throat is much inflated. While the bird is trilling, in which it excels every songster of the grove in rapidity and clearness, and in the swells and cadences which it gives to the same trill, the throat has a very strong convulsive motion, and the whole bird appears to be worked into a high state of excitement.\*

The Blackcap will soon become familiar in confinement, and will sing the greater part of the year. It will readily take to feed on bruised hemp-seed and bread, if some currants, raspberries, or other small fruit be stuck in it. As it is fond of bathing, it should be well supplied with fresh water for that purpose.

\* Mudie's Feathered Tribes.

## THE WOOD WREN.

*SYLVIA SYLVICOLA*, LATH.

THIS elegant little bird, sometimes called the Larger or Shaking Wood Wren, is frequently confounded with the Hay-bird (*Sylvia trochilus*) and the Chiffchaff (*Sylvia hippolais*); from both of which it is however easily distinguishable in plumage, in expression, and manners.

The Wood Warbler (says Mr. Mudie) is one of the most beautiful of our summer visitants.

The silvery whiteness of the under parts of this bird has obtained for it in some places the local name of "lenty white."

"This elegant and interesting little bird," observes Mr. Sweet, "arrives in this country the beginning of April, and leaves it in August or the beginning of September. I have never observed it in any other situation than amongst tall trees in woods and plantations, where it is readily detected on its arrival by its shrill shaking sort of note, which may be heard at a great distance, and cannot be confounded with the song of any other bird. When it arrives, it continues to sing nearly all the day long, and its song is continued more or less through most part of the summer, except the time that it is engaged in feeding its young; it is then dis-

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covered by a dull mournful sort of call, quite different from that of any other bird."

Though this bird does not nestle in trees, it is always in their vicinity (says Mr. Mudie): they form its pasture, and it gives the preference to such as are lofty. Its food consists of the caterpillars which curl, roll, or otherwise injure the leaves of deciduous trees, and the flies and moths by which these are deposited in the egg state, and into which they are changed. Its short flights from and to the tree are no doubt made for the purpose of discovering the retreats of these caterpillars; and its habits of thus beating round the foliage of the tree agree with its structure as being of a flying and not a leaping bird, as all birds are which hunt among the stems and branches.\*

The nest is placed on the ground in a thicket of small bushes, and consists of moss and dry leaves, with a covering at the top of the same materials, so that it is scarcely possible to distinguish it without watching the old birds' toil, either when they are building or carrying food to their young. It is invariably lined with fine grass, and a few long hairs. The eggs are six in number, sprinkled all over with purplish spots. In some these markings are confluent, inclining to rust colour.

This is not an uncommon species, having been met with in most parts of the south of England and Wales, and as far westward as Cornwall. It seems

\* Mudie's British Birds.

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partial to oak and beech woods, where it may be found by its singular note, which seems to express the word "*twee*," drawn out to some length, and repeated five or six times successively, terminating with the same notes delivered in a hurried manner, at which times it shakes its wings. This seems to be the extent of its song, the latter part of which is chiefly left out after the breeding season. It is also found in Germany, where it is likewise a migrative bird.\*

\* Ornithological Dictionary.



## THE SEDGE BIRD.

*SYLVIA SALICARIA*, LATH.

THIS bird is sometimes known by the names of Sedge Wren, Willow Lark, or Lesser Reed Sparrow. Bewick calls it the Reed Fauvette.

This pretty little species (says Sweet) is very plentiful in the neighbourhood of London, which it visits the beginning of April, and leaves again in September, frequenting the sides of the river, or any ditches, where there is a thicket of reeds, or sedge, in which it builds its nest, and is almost continually in song both by day and night. Its song consists of a variety of notes, some of which are very loud, and may be heard at a considerable distance, generally beginning with ‘*chit, chit, chiddy, chiddy, chiddy, chit, chit, chit.*’ It is a very lively bird, and shows scarcely any symptoms of fear, approaching very near to any person who does not drive or frighten it; and it soon becomes very tame and familiar in confinement, where, if well managed, it will sing the greater part of the year.\*

Mr. J. Main, in the Magazine of Natural History, says the Sedge Warbler “is a songster of most wonderful powers. He may be called the Italian, as to style, for the whole excellence consists in the variety of his long-continued extravaganza;

\* British Warblers.

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spirited, changeful, precipitously running over every note and half-note within the compass of his pipe, quicker than even attention can follow; touching, as he passes, the notes of other birds so exactly that he has been called a mocking bird, and supposed to possess the power of imitating all others. Sometimes he soars up in the air, jerking in his flight and singing as he descends, in the manner of the Whitethroat. But what adds peculiarly to his value as a vocalist is his propensity to be a serenader, especially if he happens to be disturbed by any noise."

The song of this bird (says Montagu) has been erroneously given to the Reed Sparrow by various authors, whereas that bird has no notes that deserve the name of song; but as they frequent the same places to breed, and the Reed Sparrow is conspicuous on the upper branches, while this little Warbler, concealed in the thickest part, is heard aloud, the song has been confounded.

The Sedge Bird feeds on dragon-flies, may-flies, ephemeræ, and other insects that frequent marshes; and it is curious to see how quickly it darts from the reeds or willow-roots, catches the fly, and flits back again.\*

The nest is made amidst the sedge and reeds which grow by the sides of rivers or in watery places, and is composed of a little moss intermixed with dried stalks, lined with dried grass, and occasionally with a few hairs; sometimes it is fastened between two or three reeds: others we have found

\* Syme.

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(observes Montagu) in a tuft of rushes on the ground, or very near it, fastened round the bottom of them; at other times, in a low bush, or on the stump of a willow. The eggs are five or six in number, of a light brown colour, mottled with darker shades of the same. The nests of the Sedge and Reed Warblers (observes the author of the British Naturalist) are constructed in those plants from which they take their names, or in other aquatic plants; and the construction shows a great deal of ingenuity. They are firmly attached to a sufficient number of stalks for preventing any accident. The mass of dry materials is so great, that it would not only float if detached, but float so far out of the water, as that the eggs would not come in contact with that fluid. They are also made so deep, that any agitation to which the strongest wind could subject the plants to which they are attached, would be unable to shake the bird or the eggs out of the nest.

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confinement ; and if brought up from the nest, it may be learned to sing any tune that is whistled or sung to it. Its food (says Mr. Sweet) is the same as that of the Whinchat : it is a delicate bird, and always requires to be supplied with insects.

## THE WHITETHROAT.

*SYLVIA CINEREA*, LATH.

THIS bird is about the same size and weight as the Blackcap, only the tail is rather longer, and the wings rather shorter. The upper part of the head is bright grey, the throat white, the general colour of the back yellowish brown and grey, the belly white, and the breast of the male tinted with rose colour in the spring. The female inclines more to reddish brown than the male, and has not the rose colour on the breast.

The Whitethroat arrives in this country about the middle of April, when it becomes pretty generally diffused over all parts of the kingdom which are enclosed.

The song of the Whitethroat (says the author of the British Naturalist) is rather pleasing, but it has not the compass or the melody of that of the Blackcap: and while that bird sings only when perching, (generally on a lofty tree or the highest point of the coppice near the nest,) the Whitethroat repeats its short song upon the wing. Its singing appears to be a considerable effort; for the throat is very much distended, and the feathers on the top of the head are erected so as to form a sort of crest. It utters its song as it rises from the spray on

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which it has been perched, to a considerable height in the air, descending slowly to the same spot.

Sweet describes this bird as “a very lively and interesting species, and one of the easiest preserved. Its song also, in my opinion, cannot be surpassed by any bird whatever: it is lively, sweet, and loud, and consists of a great variety of notes.

“It is readily taken in a trap baited with a living caterpillar or butterfly. In their native state, these birds feed chiefly on small insects, and a few sorts of fruit, strawberries and raspberries in particular: they are very partial to the different species of aphides, with which almost every tree is covered some time or other in the summer; they are also very fond of the smaller species of butterflies, and the common house-fly. They soon take to feed on bruised hemp-seed and bread, and also on bread and milk. Fresh meat both fat and lean they also like very well for a change, and the yolk of a boiled egg, and a roasted apple in winter. They pick up a great quantity of small gravel, of which there should be always a constant supply in their cage or aviary: if they are without this, they soon get unwell. Fresh water should also be given them occasionally in a saucer or pan, large enough for them to get into to wash themselves.”

The nest is made of goose-grass, lined with fibres, and sometimes a few long hairs with some finer grass,—but is of so flimsy a texture that it can afford little warmth to the eggs or young: this is generally placed in some low bush amongst nettles or other luxuriant herbs. The eggs are

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four or five in number, of a greenish white, speckled all over with light brown, or ash colour, in great variety as to shade and thickness of sprinkling.

In the nesting season, the Whitethroat keeps much in the retirement of its hedges and bushes, not leaving the cultivated grounds, but choosing those parts of them where the cover is thickest or most retired. Towards the latter part of summer they throng to the gardens, where they levy contributions on all the early small fruits. In the market-gardens especially, where these are interspersed with hedge-rows and patches of tangled brake, they do a great deal of mischief; but still, if the service which they have previously rendered by destroying the caterpillars, which are their principal food, be fairly thrown into the other scale, it is probable that the balance of good is on their side.\*

There are no birds (says the Honourable Mr. Herbert) less shy and less pugnacious than the Whitethroats. They are amicable in the highest degree. The Blackcap is, on the contrary, shy and wary: while it is singing, it is always on the watch, and shifting its place so as to avoid being seen; but the Whitethroat sings boldly close to a person looking at it; and although White deprecates its song, Mr. Herbert thinks it is only to be surpassed by the Blackbird and the Thrush,—except, of course, the matchless Nightingale, with whose song all comparison of melody in this world

\* Feathered Tribes of the British Islands.

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is idle. In a room (says Mr. Herbert) the song of the Whitethroat is very pleasing; and their excessive familiarity and gentleness, and their healthy constitution, make them the most pleasing birds that can be kept in a cage.

The Whitethroat has a variety of names; for instance, Nettle-creeper, Muggy-cut-throat, Whey-beard, Wheetie-why-bird, Muff, Charlie-muftie, Peggy, Peggy Whitethroat, Churr, Whautie.



THE YELLOW WILLOW WREN,  
OR HAY-BIRD.

*SYLVIA TROCHILUS*, LATH.

THIS elegant little species visits us about the middle of April, and leaves us again the latter end of September or beginning of October. It is plentiful in some parts ; frequents wooded and enclosed situations, especially where willows abound ; is frequently found with the Wood Wren, but does not extend so far to the West of England, as it is rarely met with in Cornwall.\*

Mr. Sweet says these birds are very plentiful some seasons, flying about from tree to tree, and singing their pretty soft note, which is not unlike the song of the Redbreast, but not so loud. Wherever any plants are infested with any kind of aphid, there the Willow Wrens are almost certain to be, often quarrelling, and flying after one another ; and they will even attack other birds that are much larger than themselves.

It is easily taken in a trap baited with small caterpillars, or a rose-bush covered with aphides ; and it will soon become very tame in confinement.†

About the latter end of April or beginning of May it makes a nest of an oval shape, with

\* Ornithological Dictionary.

† British Warblers.

SONG BIRDS OF GREAT BRITAIN.

a small opening near the top, composed of moss and dried grass, and lined with feathers. This is placed in the hollow of a ditch, or in a low bush close to the ground. "The materials of the nest," says Mr. Rennie, "are a framework of dried grass stems, intermixed with a few bits of green moss (*hypnum prælongum*, &c.), and sometimes a few leaves or thin flexible slips of birch-bark, with a warm lining of soft feathers within, laid more loosely than is usual in such nests. The entrance, which is in front, immediately under the arched dome, is considerably wider than that of the common Wren, though the bird itself is no thicker, but a trifle longer in the body."\*

The eggs are six or seven in number, white, spotted with light rust colour towards the larger end; others are sprinkled all over.

Mr. Mudie says of the nest, that the materials used in the external parts are dry vegetable fibres, and rarely, if ever, moss. The fibres of course vary with what the locality supplies; but the culms of the wild grasses of the former year, together with the slender wiry leaves which have faded in the winter, are the predominating ones; so that the nest is externally like a little clot of hay, and hence the vernacular name of "Hay-bird."

The plumage of this species is so like that of the Chiff-chaff, that were it not for its superior size, it would be difficult to distinguish them. The size and the colour of the legs are, however, an unerring mark of distinction; those of the Willow

\* Architecture of Birds.

YELLOW WILLOW WREN.

Wren being light brown, and of the Chiff-chaff dusky.

When the males of these birds (observes Mr. Mudie) first arrive, which in the South of England is very early in April, they perch on the tops of hedges, bushes, and willows, and raise their song, to which there is a very peculiar prelude. First there is a sort of broken chirp, then a retiring tinkle, and after that the song, consisting of three distinct notes, but modulated into many more. Its habits somewhat resemble those of the Wrens and Creepers, as it is found running among the branches, and partially on the stems.

Like most of the early visitants, these birds come in small flocks; but they separate soon after their arrival, form their pairs, and commence their building, which is rather a laborious operation. If the weather prove kindly, they go on well; but if frost set in, as it often does, they suffer considerably by the cold, and probably also from hunger: several are found dead if such weather continue, and the song of the remainder ceases for a time.\*

This bird is sometimes called Ground Wren, or Ground Huckmuck.

\* Mudie's British Birds.

THE BABILLARD,  
OR LESSER WHITETHROAT.

*SYLVIA CURRUCA*, LATH.

THIS species is considerably smaller than the Whitethroat, being five inches and a quarter only in length, and proportionally smaller in all its dimensions. The other differences consist in the bill being much shorter than that of the Whitethroat; the under as well as the upper mandible is dusky; the legs darker; the whole under parts of the plumage much whiter; and the upper parts do not possess the least appearance of rufous brown, which in the other bird is more or less invariably found, especially in the wing coverts. The head and upper part of the Babillard have an appearance of ash colour, or greyish blue; and the coverts are relieved with ash colour instead of rusty brown, as in the Whitethroat. The whole breast and belly, as well as the throat, are nearly snow-white. The legs are greyish black, or deep lead colour.

This bird inhabits the hedges and bushes much more closely than the Whitethroat, (observes Mr. Mudie,) and does not sing on the wing. Indeed, it can hardly be said to sing at all, as its note consists of two whistling chatters, the second delivered a

#### BABILLARD.

little more quickly than the first; but while it flits about in the hedge, bush, or brake, seldom exposing itself to view, and then only for a moment, it is not sparing of its voice; and on that account it has got the appellation of "*Garrula*," or Chatterer (*Curruca garrula*, Brisson). Mr. Rennie says it prefers a garden, an orchard, or a plantation of gooseberry or currant-bushes; whence it is a frequent inhabitant of market-gardens near London.

It arrives in this country towards the latter end of April or the beginning of May. It is easily discovered (says Montagu) by its shrill note, which is scarcely to be called a song, as it is only a repetition of the same whistling note ("atch, atsh," as Bechstein gives it,) several times in a hurried manner; besides which, it has a soft pleasing song, not to be heard unless very near.

In its wild state, it feeds principally on flies and other small insects; it is also partial to several sorts of fruit, such as cherries, plums, apples, pears, and grapes. In confinement, it will soon become tame and familiar, and will readily take to feed on bread and milk, and also on bruised hemp-seed and bread.\*

Its nest is not very unlike that of the Whitethroat. It is concealed in a hedge or thick bush, rarely in a tuft of annual herbage, formed of vegetable fibres, loosely but not clumsily put together, and lined with finer fibres, generally mixed with wool or hair. Mr. Herbert says it is placed in the

\* Sweet's British Warblers.

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fork of a rose-bush or thorn, sometimes eight or nine feet from the ground; sometimes in a low briar. The eggs are four or five in number, of a bluish white, speckled with brown and ash colour at the larger end, and sometimes a few distant spots all over.

## THE NIGHTINGALE.

*SYLVIA LUSCINIA*, LATH.

THIS far-famed bird is the largest of the warbler genus, being about seven inches in length, and between ten and eleven in the extent of the wings.

It is found very generally diffused throughout Europe, as far north as Sweden, in the greater part of Asia, and it has also been found on the banks of the Nile.

It arrives in this country the latter end of April, but sometimes not till the beginning of May. The females do not arrive till a week or ten days after the males. There is but a very slight difference between the sexes in appearance. The female, however, is smaller, rather darker on the upper and lighter on the lower parts of the body; the white on the throat is less extensive, and the upper part of the head is tinged with red.

Lofty woods by clear waters, among rich meadows and fields, where there is an exuberance of vegetation, and consequently an ample store of soft and smooth caterpillars, are the places for the Nightingale. In these it sings its song, rears its brood in the closest retirement, but with the most tender and assiduous care; and when it has accom-

SONG BIRDS OF GREAT BRITAIN.

plished that, the grand object of its visit, it retires with the same quietness as it came; not flocking with its kind before its departure, as some other birds do.\*

In their song the Nightingales have generally been considered to surpass all the choristers of the air. Their notes are exquisitely varied, soft and harmonious, and rendered still more pleasing by their being poured forth in the night, when the other warblers are silent. They begin their song in the evening, and generally continue for the whole night. For weeks together, if undisturbed, they sit upon the same tree.

It is at those tender seasons, when the sun has withdrawn his honest beams from us, and resigned his dominion to the less brilliant luminary, the queen-regent of the night, that the Nightingale's song appears most sweet and enchanting. At these delightful periods the mind is more especially wooed to contemplation. Our thoughts appear to be withdrawn from the external world as twilight spreads around us, and become centred in our hearts.

Now is the pleasant time,  
The cool, the silent, save where silence yields  
To the night-warbling bird, that, now awake,  
Tunes sweetest his love-labour'd song.†

The Nightingale sings likewise in the day-time, though its notes are not so sweet or striking as those uttered by the same bird at midnight.

Most of the ancient, and indeed some of the

\* British Naturalist.

† Paradise Lost, b. V.



NIGHTINGALE.

modern poets, have represented the Nightingale's song as plaintive and melancholy. Coleridge, however, in some beautiful lines on this bird, exclaims—

“ A melancholy bird? Oh! idle thought —  
In Nature there is nothing melancholy.  
\* \* \* 'Tis the merry Nightingale  
That crowds, and hurries, and precipitates  
With fast thick warble his delicious notes,  
As he were fearful that an April night  
Would be too short for him to utter forth  
His love-chaunt, and disburthen his full soul  
Of all its music! \* \* \* \*  
\* \* \* \* Far and near,  
In wood and thicket, over the wide grove,  
They answer and provoke each other's song,  
With skirmish and capricious passagings,  
And murmurs musical and swift jug-jug,  
And one low piping sound more sweet than all—  
Stirring the air with such a harmony,  
That should you close your eyes, you might almost  
Forget it was not day!”

This bird prepares a nest the latter end of May of a very simple construction, made of dry leaves, generally of the oak, and lined with dry grass, usually placed on the ground amongst the same materials of which it is composed; so that it is not easily discovered. The eggs are four or five in number, of a uniform dark brown colour. As soon as the young are hatched, the song of the parent bird is no more heard during the remainder of its stay with us. “After the month of June,” says Buffon, “the Nightingale sings no more, and he retains only a hoarse cry, a sort of

SONG BIRDS OF GREAT BRITAIN.

croaking, by which the melodious Philomel cannot be recognised; and it is not surprising that formerly, in Italy, they gave him a different name under these circumstances. He is indeed another bird a bird — altogether different in respect of voice, and even, in a great degree, in respect of colour of his plumage.”

When wild, Nightingales feed on insects, especially little green caterpillars, flies and beetles, and the grubs of insects hid among moss or in the earth, which are discovered by turning it up.

In order to obtain the genuine wild notes of these birds, they should be caught shortly after their arrival in this country, by observing their haunts, and scratching up a piece of ground close by, where a trap should be placed, baited with meal-worms, or some such food. When caught, they should be placed in a square, roofed cage, with close wires, covered by paper. The cage should then be placed in some retired situation, away from light, and the bird fed with ants' eggs, meal-worms, and the like. The second or third day after they have been caught, they may be hung outside the window; when they will begin to sing. After a time the paper may by degrees be removed; when they will soon become acquainted with the person who attends them, and will often evince considerable attachment. With proper management they may be kept for several years in a state of confinement.

The food recommended by Bechstein for Nightingales, when fresh ants' eggs cannot be procured,

#### NIGHTINGALE.

is dried or rather roasted ox-heart and carrot, both grated, and then mixed with dried ants' eggs. A little lean beef or mutton minced small may also be used sometimes. They require fresh water every day, as well for bathing as drinking.

Mr. Sweet says they will soon take to feed on bruised hemp-seed and bread, if a few insects be stuck on it. The larvæ of the cockchaffer or may-bug, which is sometimes very plentiful in grass-fields, may be procured in great abundance, and kept in pots of turfy earth through the winter, giving each bird one or two a day. Common maggots, also, in the larva or pupa state, they are very fond of; as well as spiders, earwigs, crickets, and various other insects.

THE GREATER PETTICHAPS,  
OR FAUVETTE.

*SYLVIA HORTENSIS*, LATH.

THE PETTICHAPS, or Garden Warbler, is a shorter bird than the Whitethroat; but it is thicker and heavier. The whole of the upper part is of a dull green, with a shade of grey, and a patch of ash-grey pretty far down upon each side of the neck. The whole of the under part has a tinge of grey; but the predominant tints are white on the throat and vent, and brownish yellow on the breast and flanks: the eyes also are surrounded with white.

The female differs only in having the under part of the body as far as the breast of a lighter colour.

“It first visits us,” says Sweet, “in the spring, about the latter end of April or the beginning of May; and its arrival is soon made known by its very loud and long song. It generally begins very low, not unlike the song of the Swallow, but raises it by degrees, until it resembles the song of the Blackbird, singing nearly all through the day, and the greater part of the time that it stays with us, which is but short, as it leaves us again in August. In confinement it will sing nearly all through the year, if it be treated well. In a wild state it is generally found in gardens and plantations, where

#### GREATER PETTICHAPS.

it feeds chiefly on fruit, and will not refuse some kinds of insects; it is very fond of the larva or caterpillar that is often found in great abundance on cabbage-plants, the produce of *Papilio brassicæ*, and I know no other bird that will feed on it. Soon after its arrival here the strawberries are ripe, and it is not long before it finds them out; the cherries it will begin before they are quite ripe; and I know not any kind of fruit or berry, which is wholesome, that it will refuse. It generally tastes the plums, pears, and early apples, before it leaves us; and when in confinement it also feeds freely on elder, privet, and ivy berries: it is also partial to barberries, and a soft apple or pear."

It is chiefly found to inhabit thick hedges, where it makes a nest, composed of goose-grass, and other fibrous plants, flimsily put together, like that of the common Whitethroat, with the addition sometimes of a little green moss externally. The nest is placed in some low bush near the ground. It lays four eggs, of a dirty white, blotched all over with light brown, most numerous at the larger end, where spots of ash colour also appear.\*

The hidling manners of this bird (observes Mr. Mudie) may prevent it from being known, even where its song is heard. It is a hedge, copse, and thicket bird, and does not, like the Blackcap, sing from a high perch, but from the close cover; and as that cover is in foliage all the time that it remains, it is not very often seen even by those who search

\* Ornithological Dictionary.

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for it. Its notes are, perhaps, the softest of any that have equal volume and compass: they want that clear silvery tone which pierces the ear so much in the song of the Nightingale; but they are exquisite flute notes; and the whistling part of the stave, which is almost as full and mellow as that of the Blackbird, has an unbroken swell which is at once characteristic and peculiar.

Of the inhabitants of our woods (says Buffon) Fauvettes are the most numerous and agreeable. Lively, nimble, always in motion, they seem occupied only with play and pleasure. As their accents express only joy, it is a pretty sight to watch them sporting, pursuing, and enticing each other: their attacks are gentle, and their combats end with a song.

## THE WHINCHAT.

*SYLVIA RUBETRA*, LATH.

THIS bird gets its trivial name from the partiality that it has to bushes of the whin or furze; and the places in which it is most abundant are commons that are overrun with those bushes.

The Whinchat arrives in the south of England about the middle of April. It breeds in furzy places, and makes its nest on the ground amongst the grass, at the bottom of a bush, very artfully concealed, generally forming a path through the grass to it. This nest is composed of dried grass and stalks with very little moss externally, and lined with fine dried grass. The eggs are generally six in number, entirely blue, without a spot.

It seems a more local species than the Chickstone, or Stonechat; is rarely found in the further part of Devonshire and in Cornwall, but is plentiful in Somersetshire, Wiltshire, and Gloucestershire, and the more eastern parts. Selby traced it also a considerable way into Scotland.

The female is much less bright in colour; the white over the eye is yellowish; the wing-coverts brownish with scarcely any marks of white, as in the male.\*

This elegant little bird (says Montagu) sings

\* Ornithological Dictionary.

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very prettily, and that not unfrequently suspended on the wing over the furze. It always sits on the top branches of a bush watching for flies, its principal food; and, like the fly-catchers, will dart into the air, and return to the same spray repeatedly.

Mr. Sweet observes, its song is not one of the best; still, among other birds, it makes a pleasing variety. It is very easily taken in a trap baited with some living insect, and soon gets familiar in a cage, where it will readily take to feed on the bruised hemp-seed and bread, if a few insects are stuck in it at first; it is also very fond of raw lean meat cut in small pieces, or of the yolk of a boiled egg: it will feed on almost every kind of insect, and is particularly fond of small beetles, earwigs, and butterflies. It is, however, a very tender bird to keep in confinement, as it is very impatient of cold.

These birds (says Bechstein) vary till the third year. The young ones, which may be seen perched on cabbages and other plants, even on strong wheat-stalks, have the whole of the upper part of the body covered with red and blackish spots, and each feather edged with this colour, before the first moulting: the under part of the body is like the female.

In the house they must be kept in a Nightingale's cage.



## THE TREE PIPIT.

*ANTHUS ARBOREUS*, BECHST.

No bird (observes Montagu) has been more confounded than this species of Lark. It visits this country in the spring, but is rarely seen till the beginning of May, and is most frequently mistaken for the Meadow Pipit, to which it bears great resemblance in plumage and habits; but as a special mark of distinction, the base of the bill in this is broader, and the hind claw is much shorter, and more hooked: the throat and breast are also much more inclined to yellow than the Meadow Pipit is found to be in spring.

The bill and hind claw of this bird are unerring marks of distinction by which it may at once be discriminated from the other. Its legs are also uniformly of the same pale yellowish brown colour, never becoming dusky, as in the matured birds of the other species.

The Tree Pipit is by no means plentiful, but appears to be thinly scattered over most of the enclosed parts of England; is never met with on moors or downs, where the Meadow Pipit is most frequent. Its song is vastly superior to that bird, though somewhat similar: this it delivers from the branch of a tree, or on the wing as it is descending to the ground. From the beginning of May to

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July, it may be seen mounting in the air in a fluttering manner, at the same time uttering a twittering note, and then descending to some neighbouring tree with motionless wing, and the tail thrown up. At this time it sings, but never when rising.\*

The Tree Pipit is larger than the other species, and heavier; but it is more compactly feathered, and more slender at the shoulders. It frequents the rich country, but more on the margin of the woodland than that of the open wild. It has, in consequence, some resemblance in its habits to the sylvan warblers, upon whose domain it borders, and with which it makes its appearance, and takes its departure.

Its single cry, though "peeking," is more musical and less melancholy than that of the other Pipits; and its song is also sweeter, and being warbled from a greater elevation, and in places that are more frequented, it is more generally heard. It generally, if not always, nestles upon the ground; constructs its nest of vegetable fibres, and lines it with finer fibres and hair. But it never builds far from trees; and when the male is in song, he generally makes use of a tree as an intermediate station, both in rising in the air, and in descending to the ground. By successive leaps, he gains the top of the tree; and after having rested there for a little, he leaps higher into the air in a similar manner, and chirping as he leaps. When he has gained the top of his ascent (which is not very

\* Ornithological Dictionary.

TREE PIPIT.

lofty), he begins his song ; and while uttering it, he slides down the air with expanded wings, and tail erected and spread, till he again reaches the tree, where he pauses a little, and then descends to the ground in the same manner.\*

We have found this bird (says Montagu) as far west as Devonshire, but rarely in Cornwall ; also in the westernmost parts of South Wales, and in most of the southern parts of England ; but nowhere so plentiful as in the north of Wiltshire.

\* Mudie's British Birds.

## THE CHIMNEY SWALLOW.

*HIRUNDO RUSTICA*, LINN.

THE name of Chimney Swallow was given to this bird on account of its usually selecting a chimney to build in. It likewise builds in steeples, ruins, rocks, and the sides of pits and quarries.

The Swallow is rather low on the scale as a vocalist; yet his twittering lay is often listened to with delight whilst perched on the chimney top at early dawn. The song consists of a short strain prettily enough modulated, repeated at intervals, and always ending with a shrill note rapidly shaken. He also sings on the wing in fine weather.

The length of this bird is seven inches, and the breadth about twelve. One remarkable character of the Swallow is the great length of the external feathers of the tail, and the deep fork which they give to that appendage. The young of the same year have not the long tail-feathers.

The Swallow is undoubtedly (says White) the first comer of all the British Hirundines, and appears in general on or about the 13th of April; now and then a straggler is seen much earlier.

The most lovely scenes would lose much of their summer interest, if it were not for the presence and

#### CHIMNEY SWALLOW.

lively motions of the Swallow. The banks of rivers and the margins of small lakes are at all times delightful places for quiet contemplation and for agreeable walks, when the sultry day draws near to a close, or on those stilly and transparent days which immediately precede rain. But there is an excess of repose about them which would soon become monotonous and heavy, except for the evolutions of the Swallows, now shooting into mid air, now skimming the surface of the water, and sipping or laving its plumage, as it speeds along, alternately with darting wing and with dart-like glide. Then, when we think of the myriads of gnats and flies which the teeming waters are constantly giving to the air, to sport (and sting) for their few hours, deposit their eggs and die, making the shores and shallows which are inaccessible even by the minnow rank with their innumerable carcasses, we feel how much the Swallow contributes to keep sweet and clean those waters over which it glides, quaffing or bathing the while. The air too is so still, that we hear the repeated strokes of its bill as it captures those insects which to our sight are viewless.\*

Early in the summer, (says Goldsmith,) when the returning sun begins to rouse the insect tribe from their annual state of torpidity—when the gnat and the beetle put off their earthly robes and venture into air, the Swallow then is seen returning from its long migration beyond the ocean, and making its way feebly to the shore. At first, with the timi-

\* Mudie's British Birds.

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dity of a stranger, it appears but seldom, and flies but slowly and heavily along, frequenting lakes and mill-ponds. As the weather grows warmer, and its insect supply increases, it then gathers greater strength and activity. Should severe weather prevail, as it often does after its arrival, the Swallows disappear, probably to collect in sheltered valleys, where they sustain a bare existence on the few insects they may find abroad till the return of milder weather. When the weather promises to be fair, the insect tribe feel the genial influence, and make bolder flights : at that time the Swallow follows them in their aërial journeys, and often rises to imperceptible heights in the pursuit. When the weather is likely to be foul, the insects feel the first notices of it ; and from the Swallows following low we are often apprised of the approaching change.

Swallows are distinguished from their congeners as well by the length and forkedness of their tails, as by the red spot on the forehead and under the chin. They are the most nimble of all the species ; and when the male pursues the female in amorous chase, they then go beyond their usual speed, and exert a rapidity almost too quick for the eye to follow.\*

The food of this bird, as of the whole genus, is winged insects ; in catching which it is extremely dexterous ; and, considering the velocity of its flight, its sight must be incomparably quick.

The nest is made of mud plastered together,

\* White's Selborne.

#### CHIMNEY SWALLOW.

and lined with feathers, and is open at the top. The eggs are from four to six in number, white speckled with rusty red. The first brood is generally hatched about the last week in June or the first week in July. The young are at first fed in the nest, or upon the chimney-top: they are afterwards, for a short time, fed on the wing. The dam, according to White, betakes herself immediately to the business of a second brood as soon as she is disengaged from her first; which at once associates with the first broods of House Martins, and with them congregates, clustering on sunny roofs, towers, and trees. The second brood depends in a great measure on the season. Should the early summer be fine, the first brood is hatched early: but should the summer be wet and cold, this is deferred for a considerable time, and only one brood is hatched.\*

At the latter end of September the Swallows leave us. Before they depart, for some weeks they to a bird (observes White) forsake houses and chimneys, and roost in trees, assembling in large flocks. At dawn of day, when their migration is decided upon, they rise *en masse*, and proceed with a placid and easy flight southwards. Most of the Swallow kind migrate; but some stragglers stay behind—probably some of the later broods. These (says White) seem to lay themselves up to come forth in warm weather, as bats do continually of a warm evening after they have disappeared for weeks. The Swallow is said to winter in

\* Goldsmith's Animated Nature.

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Senegal, and probably in many other warm countries.

“The Swallow,” says Sir H. Davy, “is one of my favourite birds, and a rival of the Nightingale ; for he glads my sense of seeing as much as the other does my sense of hearing. He is the joyous prophet of the year, the harbinger of the best season : he lives a life of enjoyment amongst the loveliest forms of nature ; winter is unknown to him ; and he leaves the green meadows of England in autumn for the myrtle and orange groves of Italy, and for the palms of Africa.”

THE END.

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